DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 050 378 CG 006 382

AUTHOR	Davis, Jerry L.
TITLE	Short-Term Counseling: Is It Effective?
INSTITUTION	American Personnel and Guidance Association, Washington, D.C.; Temple Univ., Philadelphia, Pa.
PUB DATE	Apr 71
NOTE	15p.; Paper presented at the American Personnel and Guidance Association Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, April 4-8, 1971
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Ability, Academic Performance, Behavioral Counseling, *Counseling, *Counseling Effectiveness, Counseling Programs, Educational Development, *Educational Guidance, *Gifted, *High School Students, Reinforcement, Secondary School Students, Talented Students

ABSTRACT

Counselors at the Research and Guidance Laboratory for Superior Students at the University of Wisconsin prepared specific suggestions designed to assist participating high school students in their educational development. One hundred and eight academically superior students were assigned to three experimental groups and one control group. Following the usual program activities, each of the three experimental groups were offered an additional brief contact procedure to encourage them to initiate action on counselor suggestions: (1) reinforcement counseling; (2) written communications to subjects; and (3) written communications to subjects' parents. Results indicate that the counseling treatment was significantly more effective in promoting students' actions on suggestions than were the written communications. Females did significantly more initiating than males. Speculation about the results concludes the report. (TL)

ED050378

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

SHORT-TERM COUNSELING: IS IT EFFECTIVE?

Jerry L. Davis
Temple University

Increasing evidence is available which contradicts the view that academically superior students will develop their strengths in spite of lack of opportunity and encouragement. Independent study programs, for example, have been demonstrated to promote learning and interest in academic areas such as chemistry and reading (Richardson, 1967; Williams and Koelsche, 1967).

Leading educators also appear to agree that academically superior youth, as well as others, need assistance to develop adequate, realistic decision-making behaviors regarding vocational and educational planning (Rothney, 1958; Krumboltz, 1966). Perluss (1963) reported that too few youth possessed sufficient sense of direction, too few had enough knowledge about the world of work, and too many had unrealistic goals, inadequate, vague ideas of what to expect after high school.

For the past thirteen years, the Research and Guidance Laboratory for Superior Students at the University of Wisconsin (Rothney and Sanborn, 1966) has drawn students of high academic performance from all over Wisconsin. One day during each year of high school, the students come to the Laboratory. During their visit, the students complete inventories, personal data blanks, and tests; they write essays and autobiographical sketches; they attend university classes or have personal interviews with faculty members in fields they wish to explore; and they have two interviews with Laboratory counselors.

CG 006 382
6382

Jerry L. Davis is Assistant Professor of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

After students attend the Laboratory, a major task for counselors is to forward suggestions designed to assist in the educational development of these youth. This investigation was to determine a brief contact procedure which counselors could employ to encourage students to initiate actions on these suggestions.

Method

Sample

Four ninth graders, four tenth graders and four eleventh graders from each of nine Wisconsin high schools comprised the sample. The total sample was thus 108 academically superior students (47 males and 61 females), 36 in each of the three grade levels.

Subjects were assigned to three experimental groups and one control group. The subjects from each of the nine high schools were equally distributed into four groups according to grade level by randomly assigning the four ninth, four tenth, and four eleventh graders from each high school to the treatments, one school at a time. The sex and grade of subjects assigned to the four groups is reported in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

The nine high schools represented a cross-section of Wisconsin high schools. The faculties ranged from one with only 19 teachers to one with 77 teachers. Student enrollments paralleled these figures ranging from two with 385 students to one with 1,318.

The 15 counselors (14 males and 1 female) were staff members at the Laboratory. The highest academic degree held by two was the bachelor degree, 11 had masters in counseling and two possessed doctorates in counselor education. The two counselors with doctorates

were professors in the Department of Counseling and Guidance at the University of Wisconsin. The other 13 counselors were graduate students in the same department. All had teaching experience prior to joining the Laboratory staff.

Counselors' Suggestions

After subjects from each high school visited the Laboratory, counselors wrote school reports containing specific suggestions deemed appropriate for their counselees. During interviews, counselors and students discussed ideas concerning actions the students might take to enrich their current educational experiences. These mutually agreed upon ideas for enrichment provided the bases for the school reports. These reports were forwarded to the students' high schools approximately two weeks after their Laboratory visits.

Treatments

Counseling techniques and written communication procedures constituted primary independent variables. Systematic verbal and non-verbal reinforcement counseling techniques employed in individual counseling sessions were compared with individually designed letters to subjects, individually tailored letters to parents of subjects, and a control group.

1. Reinforcement Counseling Techniques (Group A)

Each of the 45 minute interviews with the 27 subjects was conducted by the investigator. The interview was initiated by stating:

> Last fall your Laboratory counselor (name of counselor) designed several suggestions to assist you in your educational and social development. Let's look at each suggestion and talk about it for a few minutes.

The first suggestion was read by the investigator and a

copy of it given to the subject. He then proceeded as follows:

> What do you think of the first suggestion?
> What are some things you might try that would initiate action on this suggestion?

Each time the student offered an idea that appeared to be a good method of implementing the suggestion, the response was positively reinforced verbally ('e.g. "That's a fine idea;" "Good point" "Good--try that soon.") and/or non-verbally (e.g., smile; nod of the head; leaning forward with interest). The mutually agreed upon plan of action to implement the counselor's suggestion was noted on a form containing all of the counselor's suggestions.

To further elicit responses from the subject, the investigator added appropriate specific cues such as:

> What teacher or teachers might help you to initiate action on this suggestion? In what way? Would your counselor (name of counselor) be of assistance? How? Perhaps your parents could be of help to you. In what manner? Would one or several of your friends be willing to assist you? How?

These cues were systematically employed to suggest that significant others may provide considerable assistance when attempting to initiate actions on counselors' suggestions.

Each of the suggestions offered for the subject was discussed as above; the suggestion was read, a copy of it given to the subject, the cues provided, the appropriate responses reinforced as defined, and the mutually agreed upon plans of action recorded. Upon terminating the interview, the counselor gave the subject the form containing the suggestions with recorded plans for action and stated:

> I hope you will try the ideas you have mentioned today concerning ways to initiate actions on each of your counselor's suggestions. We will ask you during your Laboratory visit next fall to indicate your progress on these suggestions. We will look forward to seeing you in Madison.

2. Written Communications to Subjects (Group B)

Each subject received an individually devised letter from his or her Laboratory counselor. The letter contained all of the suggestions included in the school report. After stating each suggestion in the letter as it had been written in the school report, general and specific cues were provided similar to those offered by the investigator in the reinforcement counseling techniques treatment. These cues were designed to propose procedures that the counselor determined might assist the subject to initiate action on the suggestions. When deemed appropriate, the subject was encouraged to seek the assistance of significant others (e.g., parents; teacher; counselor; peers) when attempting to implement the counselor's suggestions.

To control for dissimilarities of counselor writing style, the investigator edited each letter written by Laboratory counselors. Thus, while each letter was similar in form and style, each was unique in that cues included were determined by the nature of the suggestion offered.

These written contacts were designed to parallel the reinforcement counseling techniques treatment. The one obvious difference was that this procedure did not permit the employment of verbal and nonverbal reinforcements provided in the letter.

3. Written Communications to Parents of Subjects (Group C)

The parents of each of the subjects received an individually devised letter from their youngster's Laboratory counselor. The letter contained all of the suggestions that were included in the school report. After stating each suggestion in the letter as it had been written in the school report, general and specific cues were provided similar to those offered by the investigator in the

reinforcement counseling techniques treatment. These cues were designed to propose procedures the parents might find helpful in their efforts to encourage their youth to initiate action on each of the suggestions. When considered appropriate, it was recommended to the parents that they advise their son or daughter to seek the assistance of significant others (e.g. teachers; counselor; peer; other adults) when attempting to implement the counselor's suggestions.

As with the written communications provided directly for subjects, the investigator edited each letter.

These written contacts with parents were also planned to parallel the reinforcement counseling techniques treatment.

4. Active Control Group (Group D)

These subjects engaged in all of the usual activities provided for students selected for participation in the Laboratory program. No additional brief contact procedure was offered to encourage the subjects to initiate action on the suggestions their counselors had forwarded to their high schools.

Implementation of Treatments

The interviews were conducted at the subjects' high schools approximately one month after their visits to the Laboratory. The letters to subjects and to parents of subjects were mailed one day prior to the scheduled date for the interviews with subjects from each high school. The schedule thus permitted the application of each experimental treatment for the 12 subjects from each high school on the same date.

Criteria Collection and Validation

The criterion behavior was the number of suggestions for which

students initiated action.* Counselors were given pre-service and in-service training in use of follow-up interview techniques. Didactic instruction, demonstration, role-playing and taping were carried out during the training period. In-service training was conducted throughout the follow-up period.

Follow-up interviews were conducted during the subjects' regularly scheduled fall visits to the Laboratory. The data were collected during the initial 15-20 minutes of each subjects' regularly scheduled morning interview. The counselors explained they wished to use this time to determine if actions had been initiated on suggestions included in last year's school report. Counselors utilized a variety of cues to elicit subjects' responses in regard to the suggestions.

The investigator and two other Laboratory counselors examined independently the responses on each follow-up instrument to determine whether subjects did or did not initiate actions. Treatment groups to which subjects had been assigned remained anonymous. The judges failed to agree on their independent decisions on less than one-half of 1 percent of the responses. These differences were resolved through discussion.

RESULTS

A three-way analysis of variance as described in Scheffe' (1959) was utilized to analyze the data. Treatment group, sex, and grade level of subjects, as well as their interactions were considered.

The number of counselors' suggestions offered, as well as the number and percentage of suggestions for which actions were initiated,

*The term "action" was operationally defined as an overt behavior by a subject relevant to a suggestion offered by his counselor. The overt act did not necessarily have to result in the total implementation of the suggestion. For example, a counselor suggested a subject attend a summer science institute. As the subject applied to several institutes but did not attend due to his failure to meet the admission standards, it was concluded that he responded actively to the suggestion.

is presented in Table 2. Of the 98 suggestions offered for subjects in Group A (counseled group) 75.5 per cent were reported as being acted upon by subjects. Subjects assigned to each of the other

---

Insert Table 2 about here

---

three groups reported initiating actions on less than 60 percent of the suggestions.

It may be seen from Table 3 that treatment effects were significant at the .01 level. The Scheffe' method was used to test the significance of post-hoc comparisons between the means of the treatment groups. The obtained difference between the means of

---

Insert Table 3 about here

Group A and Group B was significant at the .05 level. Since the differences between the means of Group A and Group C and between the means of Group A and Group D both represent larger values than the difference between Group A and Group B, these differences are also statistically significant.

The differences between all other pair-wise means (i.e., Group B vs. Group C; Group B vs. Group D; Group C vs. Group D) failed to be significant at the .05 level. We thus conclude that subjects assigned to Group A (counseled subjects) initiated significantly more actions on counselors' suggestions than did subjects assigned to each of the other three treatment groups.

The percentages of counselors' suggestions for which actions were initiated by male and female subjects enrolled in the three grade levels are reported in Table 4. The F ratio in Table 3 and the larger percentage of actions taken by females as shown in Table 4 indicate that females initiated significantly more actions

on counselors' suggestions.

The interaction effect of grade and sex was significant at the

---

Insert Table 4 about here

.01 level. Male ninth graders initiated actions on 64.9 percent of their counselors' suggestions, while eleventh grade males acted upon only 46.1 percent. For females, a reverse order was found. The ninth grade females reported initiating actions on only 51.5 percent of the suggestions while eleventh grade females initiated actions on 72.2 percent. There was only a small difference between the percentage of actions taken as reported by male and female tenth graders.

Discussion

One limitation may be obvious--the counseling treatment was conducted only by the investigator. Thus, the question: Would the results have been significant if the counseling had been offered by several counselors?

Too frequently, however, research in counseling is reported where the independent variable (counseling) is offered by several counselors with little or no clarification as to <u>how</u> the counseling was conducted. The practitioner must assume upon reading such research that to help a counselee, one needs only to "counsel". Our failure to define the nature of the counseling further suggests to the practitioner that we have arrived at and are all familiar with <u>the</u> approach.

For this investigation, an effort was made to define the counseling treatment in sufficient detail so as to enlighten the practitioner regarding the counselor's behaviors. As a result,

perhaps there will be others who will report their successes and failures with the approach defined.

One might speculate as to why the counseling treatment was significantly more effective in promoting students' actions on suggestions than were the written communications. Perhaps the cues offered in counseling were more specific and thus more appropriate to the suggestions. The counselee was usually capable of suggesting ideas concerning ways to initiate actions on the suggestions within the school environment. This information was utilized by the investigator as he attempted to formulate additional specific cues for action.

Was it the reinforcement offered to the counselees? The written contacts were designed to parallel the counseling contact in every detail possible. However, only counseled subjects were systematically reinforced for their plans to initiate actions relevant to the suggestions.

Counseled subjects were encouraged to verbally commit themselves to the initiation of various actions directed toward the suggestions. Their expressed commitments to devote time and energy to the implementation of their counselors' suggestions may have been the motivation that resulted in their significantly larger percentage of actions reported.

Perhaps it was the final statement by the investigator indicating that counselors would check on their progress during their visit next fall that encouraged their actions on suggestions. It should be noted that a similar statement was also included in each of the written contacts. However, this kind of statement in a

counseling session may have more impact.

We can only state at this point that the counseling treatment as defined was effective. We have no evidence to indicate "why" it was effective in promoting the desired behaviors. Until such evidence is available, it is imperative that counselors desiring to promote similar behaviors by students be knowledgeable about all of the techniques employed in the counseling treatment.

Further studies might be designed to determine reasons why ninth grade males report acting upon approximately two-thirds of their counselors' suggestions while eleventh grade males report initiating actions on less than one-half of the suggestions. Are there certain environmental conditions in our secondary schools that tend to discourage older males from engaging in activities similar to those reported by younger males? Do the methods employed by school personnel to promote certain behaviors fail to be reinforcing to male students by the time they have attained eleventh grade status?

Similar studies should also be conducted to determine why the opposite phenomenon was found for females. Ninth grade females reported taking actions on approximately one-half of their counselors' suggestions while eleventh grade females acted upon nearly three-fourths of the suggestions. The environmental conditions as they exist today in our high schools apparently become more rewarding to females as they progress in high school. Are our high schools better equipped to motivate eleventh grade females to engage in the types of activities educators suggest are pertinent to their educational development than they are to motivate eleventh

grade males to engage in similar activities?

Although there were no systematic attempts to discover why students did initiate actions on about one-half of the suggestions concerning independent study, comments by students during follow-up interviews did indicate an area for further inquiry. Students who reported being involved in independent study projects seemed to suggest they either were provided with released time from class to engage in their pursuits or were not required to complete routine class assignments. These comments indicate that counselors might attempt to be more specific when recommending independent study in regard to how such projects might be accepted by teachers in lieu of other tasks. (If independent study is viewed only as "extra" work, perhaps it is unlikely that independent study skills will be learned by those who apparently would benefit most from involvement in these endeavors.

The results of this study suggest that counselors can effectively encourage academically superior high school students to actively respond to mutually agreed upon suggestions designed to enrich their educational development. The recommendations for further action were offered to challenge counselors to consider other approaches that might lead to significant counseling outcomes.

TABLE 1

Sex of Subjects Randomly Assigned to Four Treatment Groups According to Grade Levels.

Group	Males			Females			Totals
Grade:	9	10	11	9	10	11	
A	6	2	3	3	7	6	27
B	3	3	3	6	6	6	27
C	5	4	2	4	5	7	27
D	7	4	5	2	5	4	27
Totals	21	13	13	15	23	23	108

TABLE 2

Number and percentage of Counselors' Suggestions For Which Actions Were Initiated As Reported By Subjects in Each of the Four Treatment Groups.

Treatment Groups	Number of Suggestions Offered	No. and Percentage of Suggestions Acted Upon	
		N	%
Group A	98	74	75.5
Group B	93	53	57.0
Group C	91	50	54.9
Group D	101	48	47.5
Totals	383	225	58.7

TABLE 3

Analysis of Variance for Percentages of Actions Taken on Counselors' Suggestions as Reported By Subjects.

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Grade	2	1.898	.949	.902
Sex	1	5.751	5.751	5.467*
Grade x Sex	2	13.933	6.967	6.623**
Treatment	3	17.055	5.685	5.404**
Grade x Treatment	6	2.011	.335	.318
Sex x Treatment	3	3.993	1.331	1.265
Grade x Sex x Treatment	6	7.550	1.258	1.196
Error	84	88.455	1.052	
Totals	107	140.646		

TABLE 4

Percentage of Counselors' Suggestions For Which Actions Were Initiated As Reported by Male and Female Subjects Enrolled in Grades Nine, Ten, and Eleven.

Grade	Males	Females	Totals
Nine	64.9	51.5	57.0
Ten	56.7	54.7	55.2
Eleven	46.1	72.2	64.0
Totals	56.0	60.9	58.7

REFERENCES

Krumboltz, John D. Ed. Revolution in Counseling. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966.

Perluss, S.H. "The Product: How Does It Measure Up?" Journal of Secondary Education. 38: 10-15, 1963.

Richardson, Donald H. "Independent Study." National Association of Secondary School Principals' Bulletin. 51: 53-62, 1967.

Rothney, John W.M.. Guidance Practices and Results. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958.

Rothney, John W.M. and Sanborn, Marshall P. "Wisconsin's Research--Through Service Program for Superior High School Students." The Personnel and Guidance Journal. 44: 694-699; March, 1966.

Scheffe', Henry. The Analysis of Variance. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1959.

Williams, H.R. and Koelsche, C.L. "Organization of Chemistry Classes." Science Teacher. 35: 53-54, 1967.